



# DOWNEY DOES DOYLE

The star of *Iron Man 2* takes on the role of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's iconic super sleuth in Guy Ritchie's action packed interpretation of **SHERLOCK HOLMES.**

How did this *Sherlock Holmes* movie come to be?

**ROBERT DOWNEY JR.:** I'll make this quick.

A hundred and twenty-two years ago, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle gave birth to a character. He was probably the first superhero. He was an intellectual superhero. And he was also the first Western martial artist, I'm told, and probably one of the most recognisable images, icons, names on earth. So much that a lot of people actually think, or thought for the most part, that Sherlock Holmes was a real guy.

There's been a myriad of TV shows and film and series done on Sherlock Holmes, but I just scratch my head and go, 'I can't believe this hasn't been brought back into mainstream nowadays.' I thought, 'Why hadn't they figured it out 'til just yet?' Casting. And Guy Ritchie at the helm, because what we have in Guy Ritchie is a bad-ass gentleman, Englishman, who understands how to reinvigorate something like this. We have the ever-delectable and seriously gifted Rachel McAdams playing Irene Adler, the only woman that ever worked Sherlock like a rib. And, of course, Jude Law as Watson.

Can you talk a little bit about how you developed this characterisation of Sherlock?

Well, as you know, I'm a very serious method actor. (Laughs)

Look, I mean, I think the more we all looked into the original lexicon of the four novels and the dozens and dozens of short stories, the more we realised that, in a way, Sherlock had been misrepresented in a lot of the previous, much-loved televised and film entertainment versions of Sherlock Holmes and I think some of it was a constraint of just the times because he was very kind of liberal and trippy, and all that stuff.

But every time we were in doubt, [producer] Susan Downey, Rachel, [writer] Lionel Wigram and [producer] Joel [Silver], and I – and Jude was very central in this too – we would go back to what Doyle said these people said and how did these people describe each other? Because there are trillions of pages of data about Holmes, Watson, Adler, the adventures they go on and where they lived, what their likes and dislikes are. So we really went pretty much right back to the source. That was how we reinvigorated it – by deciding to change less than had been changed previously.

**What was it like being involved in a period film and to be involved with a character with the intense history that is Sherlock Holmes?**

Well, again, it was just so odd to me, I have been saying to Joel, shortly after the success of *Iron Man*, I was like, "Dude, where's our franchise?": And he was like, "Give me a minute." And shortly



thereafter things had kind of come together. And Lionel, if you don't mind me saying it, has kind of been trying to garnish some interest around Sherlock and there was a graphic novel-type comic book in the works about it, and when people started seeing it in that light it made it a little more palatable. That presentation got it going.

And then Joel and I got excited, and me and obviously the Mrs. [Susan Downey], we like separateness within unity. We love working together, and that has always been a fruitful thing. So, we knew it had to be done in period. We knew that we had to really roll up our sleeves and do it justice because what would be lammer than doing a version of Sherlock Holmes, given that opportunity to either sail or dump the franchise for any future takers, by making a version of it that isn't quite





## DOWNEY DOES DOYLE continued

smart enough. So we really wanted to make it without being too clever for its own good. We wanted to really root it in what we love about these characters and we wanted it to also be as exciting as what's required nowadays for a big movie.

And a big part of it, too, not to put McAdams on the spot, was we really searched far and wide to find the right foil and the right – well, she's not a heroine; she's more of a kind of a vixen adventuress – and that was a very important thing because Jude and I had a great chemistry and our very important third wheel. So casting was a big part of it.

And then we worked our asses off on this. We worked weekends. We worked after work. We worked in the thing. We took it really, really, really seriously. And I think that's why we're so proud.

### Could you talk about the martial arts training and kung fu that went into your preparation?

The funny thing is, I can do all this stuff and [Rachel's character] Irene Adler just lays him out seemingly at will. She's got more weapons and things flying out of places and dastardly stuff she does. So, I guess what I'm really getting at is no matter what kind of hard body I think I am, don't ever mess with a girl. I think if we can all walk away with something today, it's really embarrassing to get your ass kicked by a girl, unless you're a girl. But even then, you're still getting your ass kicked. So, study up. (Laughs)

### What did you find most challenging about your role?

This is how sick I am. I don't think there's anything that could be too challenging for me or even most challenging. I have an illness of confidence. What was tough? You know what I think was tough, honestly, was we had a strong script; rather, we had a really strong structure, and therein it was really up to us how far we wanted to explore and how exhaustingly we wanted to do rewrites and all that other stuff. And McAdams and I really would slave away over a hot, empty piece of text in the trailer when they were essentially set-up on stage and we were just wondering what else we could do. And then sometimes we'd lock into stuff and it would really work.

But I guess the challenging thing was that it was controlled chaos. It was very civilised. It was a largely British production and I was a little embarrassed coming back to the States because we're just like, "Work, die, die, die working." And they're like, "Let's just have a spot of tea, and

then we'll move on." (Laughs) So there was this rhythm that was created where the opportunity was on us. And Lionel, Susan and I spent so many hours really just thinking, "Let's look in the Holmes encyclopedia.

Let's look in this list of quotations." And we always found stuff there, but it was such a deep treasure trove that the big challenge was recognising how tough it was to get it right and doing it anyway.

### What are the differences between your take on this character and what the Sherlock Holmes purists would expect?

My take is what the purists would expect if the purists know what they're talking about, that is. Several of the most surprising things right off the bat are that off-associated props have never appeared in the novels or the short stories. He never wore a deerstalker cap, except maybe once for a minute. But even then it was described differently. And even the long pipe is just something that William Gillette used to not obscure his face on stage. Even the silhouettes aren't really quite accurate, so we just went back, as much as we could, without wanting to be irreverent beyond repair to how Doyle explained characters.

### You have a great way of making all of the characters feel very natural, with your improvisational style. Is that easy to bring to this period and this material?

Well, it's never easy to be relaxed. (Laughs) But we worked real hard at making it seem that way and we would write out dialogue to make it seem more natural and have a flow to it. I really do think Doyle was an amazing, amazing writer and storyteller; I didn't really quite know how great he was until we'd keep reaching out to find quotes and things he had said, or descriptions he said, or really more philosophical points of view that Doyle used through Watson and Holmes, and all that



stuff. But the boundaries are: it's Victorian England and they're gentlemen. So, it's not some of that, you know, wavy, gravy, free-flowing stuff. It's

more boundary-laden, which I think was a great challenge.

### Rachel has described this movie as a love story between Holmes and Watson.

We would say – and by the way, I've heard this is like a staple now – "We need a Butch and Sundance scene there and we need the Heat scene here, but we kept talking about Butch and Sundance. It's another thing entirely, actually, to get in the spirit of: What does that mean? It means when people are so close that they almost can't stand each other, but they can't stand on their own two feet without each other. That's what we really felt Doyle was giving us the first look at what was essentially a two-hander. And Doyle essentially is Watson, because he's telling the stories but saying Watson's telling them. So, the process with Jude really was we met. Joel was like, "Go sell 'im!" And he walked down the hall, and he's dressed in that kind of like fabulous, underdressed, super-expensive underdressed way. And I just said, "Dude." And, literally, before he said he was going to do the movie, before he said he was available, before he said that he wanted to be courted, we just started talking like two serious actors about what would need to happen to make this work as a piece of straight drama. And I think we just became really close really quick because we just rolled up our sleeves and started working from jump.

• **Sherlock Holmes is available on DVD and Blu-ray on May 6.**